The Philosophy of Ramanuja with Special Reference To His Theory of the Self

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A Reasons for selecting Ramanuja for study

The great philosopher and theologian of India during the twelfth century was Ramanuja of Sriperumbudur. Thousands of people in India are familiar with his name, adhere to the faith he founded and revere him as a saint. But this is not all. He stands out in the minds of the students of philosophy, both in India and Europe, as having made a great contribution to the learning of India and as being well worth the consideration of the students of the West. But, despite this almost universal recognition of his worth on the part of the authorities, we are surprised to find that the literature published about him, at least in the English language, is very meager. Our histories of religion mention him briefly. Studies in the ethical and theistic tendencies of Hindu thought mention him as a great reformer, but universally deal with him briefly. Many of the encyclopedias do not even give his name, whether English, American, German or French, and those that do, aside from the Encyclopaedia Britannica and the Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, give merely a bibliographical paragraph about him and say little about his system.

1 Represents a period of change in Hindu thought

There can be no doubt that, because of the contributions he made, he deserves much greater attention than he has received, for his name represents a period of change in Hindu thought.

a Sankara in his "Advaita" taught a strict impersonal monism

His great predecessor was Sankara, who lived about three centuries before him (788-850 A.D.)and whose teaching dominated the thinking of Southern India up to the time of Ramanuja. Sankara in his "Advaita" had taught a strict impersonal monism.

b Ramanuja set up a theory called "Visishtadvaita", or a Qualified monism

Against this strict monism "Ramanuja set up a theory called 'Viśishtādvaita', or qualified monism, maintaining (1) that individual souls are not essentially one with the Supreme, though he is their source, and hence that the soul after salvation enters into a relation of perfect heavenly service to him, and (2) that the Supreme is not purely abstract being, but possesses real qualities of goodness and the like, infinite in degree". 1

2 Ramanuja's views rested upon an old and Influential tradition

But we do not wish to give the impression that Rama-

1 Barnett, L.D. Hinduism, page 31

anuja created his theories entirely free from precedents, for such was not the case. As we shall see, his views rested largely upon an old and influential tradition. Others had tried to formulate in a systematic way the doctrines of the Bhagavata or Pancarata faith. For instance, in the Mahabharata we find mention of the four-fold manifestation of the Supreme Being (indeed, it is one of its distinctive tenets) and a similar reference in the Vedanta Sutras indicates that the theology of this ancient system was at least recognized and treated with respect in the highest quarters. 2

South Indian tradition seems to indicate that Vaisnavism had a continuous history almost from the period of the Bhagavadgita (about 1 A.D.). There is said to have been a succession of twelve Vaisnavite saints, called Alvars, and a like series of Acaryas, six of whom preceded Ramanuja. One of the greatest of these, supposed to have been Ramanuja's immediate predecessor in this apostolic succession of Vaisnavism, was Yamunacarya. Some of his works have been preserved. One of them, the Siddhi-traya, we are told, has for its purpose the demonstration of the real existence of the individual soul, while another, the Agamapramanya,

2 Max Müller, F. Sacred Books of the East, (S.B.E.), Vol. XXXIV, page xxiii

attacks the view that the Sutras condemn the Bhagavata teaching, and maintains the orthodoxy of that teaching. Another work, of a different nature, is the Stortra Ratna. This is also attributed to the same author. It is a brief devotional poem dedicated to Visnu. It expresses a spirit of earnest piety that may be taken as indicative of the real religious worth of this Vaisnavism of the South. "The emotion of which Ramanuja was to furnish the intellectual expression, utters itself with unmistakable earnestness in such a cry as this:" 3

"The vessel of a thousand sins, and plunged
Deep in the heart of life's outrageous sea,
I seek in thee the refuge of despair;
In mercy only, Hari, make me Thine.....
But for Thee I am masterless; save me
There's none to earn Thy mercy. Since our fate
Weaveth this bond between us, Master mine,
O guard it well and cast it not away.....
Lord Madhava, whatever mine may be,
Whatever I, is all and wholly Thine.
What offering can I bring, whose wakened soul
Seeth all Being bond to Thee for aye?" 4

There can be little doubt that when Ramanuja arose as religious leader of the eleventh or twelfth century, Vaisnavism was well established in the South though it was there that the worship of Siva had always been a strong factor. Ramanuja not only belongs to an old and well defined religious tradition that shows itself to be decisively theistic, but his theology claims to be

3 Macnicol, Nicol, Indian Theism, page 100

4 Barnett, L.D., translation in Heart of India, page 42

a faithful presentation of the old Vedantic teaching and to have the authority of the ancient interpreters behind it. "All the schools of Vedanta philosophy -- Advaita, Visistadvaita, and Dvaita -- claim to derive their teaching from three great sources -- the prasthanatraya of the Upanisads, the Bhagavadgita, and the Vedanta Sutras." 5 Ramanuja wrote no commentary, as did Sankara, on the Upanisads, but his Sri Bhasya expounds the Sutras and professes to follow the ancient teachers, the purvacaryas, who are supposed to have handed on the pure tradition of Vedantic teaching. A complete list (so far as it has been possible to discover from secondary authorities) of Ramanuja's works is as follows: Vedantasara, with commentaries and notes, Vedanta-sutras, with commentary, Gita-Bhashya, and Vedartha-sangraha. The Vedartha-Pradipa, Vedanta dipa, and Vedanta-tattva-sara are attributed to him but authorities express some doubt as to the justification for this. In all his works the dependency on traditional authority is maintained. This feeling on the part of Ramanuja taken with the indications to be pointed out in Hindu religious history gives evidence that, while Ramanuja made a definite contribution to theistic ideas, he was a natural outcome of what had gone before. This thought will receive greater devel-

5 Macnicol, page 102

opment and we shall see that a knowledge of Ramanuja and his work is important for an understanding of the progress of Hindu thought. In order that we may better understand Ramanuja's position we will follow briefly the development of religious and philosophical thought up to his time.

B Development of religious and philosophical thought up to Ramanuja's time

When we look for beginnings in Hindu thought we are carried far back to a distant and somewhat obscure period when the page of history was just beginning to open. Perhaps we may know something of the trend of thought as far back as 2000 B.C., from inferences we may draw from the very earliest Vedic literature dating from 1500 to 1000 B.C. We find that it is necessary to use great caution in attempting to know the mind of the period that the Vedic hymns represent."We should not look in the Vedic Hymns for that which it is in no wise possible we should find there, nor should we, therefore, blame them for its absence." 6 In other words, we must not decide what we shall find there before we look. We ought to try to see with something of the vision of an unsophisticated age and to feel the intuition of seers to whom nature and the

6 Macnicol, page 7

unseen world was alike vivid and near, and at the same time keep in mind that "the Vedic civilization does not mark a beginning, but the end of a long developing history in regard to both time and place." 7 We discern now and then glimpses of God rising out of what men have seen in nature. Now He transcends nature; now He is submerged. Now we have "sudden vistas" of moral purpose and moral order; and again the door is closed.

"Those who by Law uphold the Law,
Lords of the shining light of Law,
Mitra I call and Varuna." 8

We find the thought of the Vedas at one time sinking to the level of fetichism and gross superstition, and at another lost in pantheistic speculation. Yet, even in this turmoil, perhaps half-way between the two extremes, we find traces of what comes near to being theistic devotion, a tendency that is never absent from that early period on down to this day in the religious reflection of India. This is especially true as seen in the Vedic veneration of Varuna.

(1) Earliest Vedic Hymns

(Rig-Veda)

But there are many difficulties that face us in

7 Grousset, R., "Histoire de la Philosophie Orientale" translation from page 14

8 Rig Veda, I. 23,5 (Macnicol, page 9)

attempting to trace the development of Vedic thought and most serious, perhaps, is the fact that there are no reliable chronological data by which we may determine the order of the hymns. However, the following seems to be the concensus of opinion, -- We may suppose that the Hymns of the Rig Veda range over a period of seven hundred or a thousand years. 9 Certainly the minds of men during this period did not stand still. They must have been years of changing religious emotions and reflection. But it is no easy matter to find the key to the process of their growth. We can do little more than guess what may have been the background of experience and environment. There must have been many things back of them of which at most we get only now and then a glimpse -- fetichism, ancestor-worship, the dread of evil spirits, magical rites, crude phiosophies, priesthoods and sacrifices. Sometimes ritual seems to prevail. Sometimes there are indications that there has been some great outgrowth of philosophical speculation. Sometimes the emphasis is on faith and a personal devotion to God. New deities come to the front to take the place of the old ones and are themselves supplanted by still greater gods. At one time Varuna was so great that he seemed to fill the entire universe of

9. Hume, R.E., The World's Living Religions, Page 21

the Vedic poet's thought --- and even he passed away to be a mere shadow of his former might. But when the priest ruled, and when the Gods came in their succession or when the philosopher was dominant we cannot know. We can only guess and at best our conclusions will be of a doubtful character. Our main guides, apart from the contents of the Hymns themselves, must be the analogy of the course of evolution of other religions on the one hand, and the subsequent history of Indian thought on the other.

(2) Period of the Brahmanas

Even when we pass from the Vedic period to what seems to be a later period, that of the Brahmanas (800-500 B.C.), we do not leave our difficulties behind. We are still dealing with a very early period and there is much that is vague. However, we do feel a great change in the atmosphere. We feel that we have moved with the people from the invigorating air of the mountains to the heavy torpid climate of the plains. The mind seems to wander and to lose its way or to go to sleep before the journey is finished. "Certainly the contrast is vivid between the rapid, glittering stream of early Vedic thought and the meandering, wayward course, so difficult to trace in its continuity, that is followed across the plains of India by the......fears and hopes of the people of a later age." 10

10 Macnicol, page 25

"The thought that we find in the Brahmanas is the result of a long evolution, the fruit of a civilization already very ancient." 11 These writings, no doubt, are of aristocratic origin. We may be quite assured of this because they are so completely the work of the priesthood that has become "de-spiritualized" and absorbed in its gains. So we read much about the rich and powerful and the priestly blessing bestowed upon them and very little about the common people. Everywhere we meet the priest, the altar and the sacrifice. The traces of theistic aspiration are very few. Little attention is given to the desires that fill the hearts of the worshippers. However, it cannot be that all the great number of common people who were only fit to "'fill the spaces' between brick and brick" were entirely without aspiration or faith in God. If there had been no basis of faith the priesthood and the sacrificial system could not have long endured. We can trace throughout the Brahmanas indications that even behind the screen of formalism there was a two-fold process of religious growth at work. The fruits of this growth were to declare themselves at a later period. There was, on the one hand, the beginning of the more intellectual development from which sprang the Upanisads; on the other, there were hints of the presence of that devout spirit, which, more emotional and popular than reflective, expressed

11 Satapatha Brahmana. VI. 1.2.25. (Macnicol, page 29)
12 Macnicol, page 29

itself mainly in poetry and legend, and of which some account is furnished at a later date in certain sections of the Mahabharata. It is this second development that we will return to consider as being the very remote line that lead to the later idealists of whom Ramanuja was one.

b 600 B.C., Earliest Upanisads

Following the Brahmanas, as a sort of revolt against the futile and unintelligent formalism, we have the Upanisads. They evidently came from a period of great freedom of thought and remarkable activity. Their antagonism to the sacerdotalism of the Brahmanas is expressed with no little sarcasm, as when a procession of dogs is described as marching like priests, each holding the tail of the dog in front and saying, "Om, let us eat! Om, let us drink! Om, may the divine Varuna, Pragapati, Savitri bring us food! Lord of food, bring hither food, bring it, Om!" 13 However, in spite of this reaction against mere formalism we would be going too far to say that the Upanisads were entirely anti-Brahmanical. We would rather infer that we are dealing with a period of great freedom to which the Brahmans were forced to submit. Indeed, there are indications that some of the most learned were not

13 S.B.E. v I.5., page 21

Brahmans at all and that Brahmans learned at the feet of non-Brahman teachers. However, the intellectual freedom that the Upanisads express does not possess warmth of feeling that would appeal to the common people. It is probable, therefore, that the Upanisad thought was confined to a limited circle and that the worship of the personal gods was more widely spread. We may even conjecture that some of the thinkers themselves were in their religious life worshippers of Visnu and other gods. The colder atmosphere of the Upanisads is perhaps the almost inevitable atmosphere of the reflective mind. They seem to be the efforts of thoughtful men to construe their religion in terms of reason and are not necessarily antagonistic to the emotionalism of the earlier period or the theism of the later period.

2 Period from 600 B.C. to the Bhagavadgita

While it is true in the main the course of religious speculation in the pre-Christian period, or the centuries before the Bhagavadgita, was through the Upanisads with all the confusions and varieties of expressions of devotion and superstitions that they suggest, yet, even at this early date we cannot leave out of account those movements of revolt, the most im-

portant of which were Jainism and Buddhism. These two faiths, as widely as they differed from each other, were at one in their primitive state in denying a personal Supreme Spirit. And yet both as we now have them tell something of the story of the long development of Hinduism and indicate that they were phases in this development. A brief consideration of them is therefore desirable.

a Mahavira (599-527 B.C.)

Jainism is not of great importance in Hindu thought. Its development was not great and the extent of its influence has not been wide. However, it shares two characteristics with Buddhism which may have passed into it from the popular worship of the period. In the first place, it opposed the caste system which even then was getting a grip on the people. In the second place, it was missionary in spirit. Its opposition was not very strong, evidently. It has been suggested that it may have been little more than opposition to Brahman exclusiveness, for early in its history caste played its part in the religion. For a time, however, it prevailed against this social evil. The preacher of Jainism was Mahavira (599-527 B.C.) and, while the Jainas have almost entirely forsaken the teaching of their founder, yet the fact that their original character was of a democratic nature gives us a suggestion of the reaction of the time against the Brahmanas. 14

14 Eliot, Sir Charles, Hinduism and Buddhism, Vol. I, pages 106-123

b Gautama Buddha (563-483 B.C.)

"There must have been much religious earnestness and much questioning at the time when these new ways of deliverance were sought and found." 15 About the sixth century before Christ there was a great religious activity in the Magadha or middle district of Northern India. The doctrine of transmigration had by this time become firmly implanted, and all, from the king to the lowest of his subjects were seeking release. The 'road of works' or the'road of knowledge' were the orthodox ways to salvation, but these did not give satisfaction. Hence, we have devout personalities trying to find the truth. The greatest of these was Gautama Buddha (563-483 B.C.). He found the 'prize of immortality' and acclaimed it to the world. The Buddhism which developed from this discovery was essentially a 'humanism'. It was not a metaphysic or a theology, but a 'vehicle' to save men. It was a 'path' which avoided the bloody ritual of sacrifice on the one hand and the cruel asceticism on the other. It seemed to the Buddha that others had been spending their time on all sorts of unessential questions " as to the patient's circumstances, and meantime the poor sufferer had died." He proceeded to direct the attention of men away from ritual to conduct and thus rendered a great service, which, though it was not lasting in its purer form in Buddhism as it developed into a religion, yet

15 Macnicol, page 64

paved the way for later reformers. Gautama's method seemed to express itself in a sort of agnostic pragmatism. He said, "I have not elucidated that the world is eternal or that the world is not eternal, that it is finite or that it is infinite......and why have I not elucidated this? Because this profits not nor has to do with the fundamentals of religion......Misery have I elucidated -- the origin of misery the cessation of misery have I elucidated......because this does profit." 16 The whole system is built upon such pragmatism, or 'opportunism', as Warren calls it. It avoids any definition of Nirvana that would imply either survival or annihilation. The Buddha refused his disciples any metaphysical revelation. It is remarkable that out of this system which was realy an atheism grew one of the great religions of the world, and in and through which, even in its origin were elements that made the road easier for those who were later to teach a pure and ideal type of theism in India.

C The Sutras (500-200 B.C.)

The law of conduct, Dharma, was actually worked out in the minds of the Brahman priests and teachers in the period of the Brahmanas. But the actual codification probably did not take place until some time during the period between 500 B.C. and 200 B.C., when the Sutras appear. We are still considering a literature published while authority was the de-

16 Warren, Buddhism in Translations, page 122

termining law of conduct, Action had a place of precedence over reflection and the great mass of rules here expressed are not ideals conceived by speculative thinkers but are more the outcome of custom, custom and <u>karma</u>. This does not say that speculation had no place in the minds of Hindus of the period. We merely wish to emphasize the fact that along with the philosophical speculation of the time and imdependent from it grew up this set of rules for the common people. The advantages of higher thought were for the few. The multitude had to be content with authoritative guidance for the conduct of their lives. In post- Vedic times a whole department of literature in which all that had been taught and accepted in Vedic times regarding sacrifice, ritual and practical life generally had been gathered up and in order that it might be of as little burden as possible to the memories of those who had to remember it a new literary form was invented, the <u>sutra</u>. "This is a literary form to which we have nothing parallel in our literature." 17 The word is derived from the root <u>siv</u> meaning to sew. <u>Sutra</u> means thread. The term <u>sutra</u> is applied to a short abhorism or rule or book of such lines so that we have here a type of literature that is extraordinary for brevity in expression. Professor Macdonell in his <u>San-</u>

17 McKenzie, page 37

skrit Literature, (page 36) says that "the composers of grammatical Sutras delight as much in the saying of a short vowel as in the birth of a son," by way of emphasizing the extreme brevity of the form.

It is probable that the sutra form appeared about 500 B.C. and the first great class of sutras is the Srauta Sutra. This is based on revelation (sruti). It is composed of what is taught in the Brahmanas about the performance of the greater sacrifices. There are also the Grihva Sutras that deal with the ritual and rites to be performed in the household from day to day. These are chiefly based on tradition. Then we have the Dharma Sutras dealing with the problem of 'dharma'. Dharma, we are told, is a word difficult to translate. It has been variously called Law of Being, Religion, Virtue, Law and Duty. All these suggest something of the meaning, but the fact that in these early days of Hindu history no sharp distinction was drawn between moral and religious duty, usage, custom and law gives the term a broad meaning. Dharma was the term that applied to the whole complex of forms of conduct that were settled or established.

The various Vedic schools each had their own bodies of sutras of which the Srauta Sutra formed the largest part. Perhaps the most important is the Manava Dharma Sastra which has been of very special interest to later scholars. There is a long list of the

sutra literature of this period all of which was held to be of particular sacred value to one or another of the groups of Hindu religionists.

d Period of Ramayana and Mahabharata (400 B.C. to 400 A.D.)

During the four or five centuries preceding the Christian era the idea of incarnation was taking shape. This resulted in the recognition of Visnu and his various incarnations as being objects of worship on the same footing as Brahma. The great epics, the Mahabharata, (the Great Bharata War), 400 B.C. to 400 A.D., and the Ramayana,(the Career of the God Rama), 400 B.C. to 200 B.C., show us this movement in progress. The development, which continued for some centuries afterward and grew into the bhakti movement was largely due to the influence of Buddhism on Hinduism. In order to maintain itself in the face of Buddhism and like movements, Hinduism had to modify itself.From the poems we gather that "the main structure of Hinduism seems to have been completed before the time of Christ, although the popularizing of Hinduism has continued."18 Along with the Pyranas (Ancient Tales) that came somewhat later we have in the epics the final literary product among the sacred scriptures of Hinduism.

e Bhagavadgita (100 B.C. to 100 A.D.)

However, we do have the Bhagavadgita of nearly the

18 Hume, page 30

same period, (100 B.C. to 100 A.D.) which is a very high expression of Hindu devotional literature. It is a dramatic poem that starts with a stirring scene at the beginning of a battle, for the first time in the recorded history of Hinduism a Hindu knight raises the question of the propriety of killing people in war (1:28-45; 2:4-8). The charioteer quiets his masters conscientious compunctions by a remarkable discourse on immortality and the irresponsibility of the soul. To prove his point he quotes from the Katha Upanisad (2:18-19).

"It slays not, and it is not slain. It is never born, and it never dies. Weapons cleave it not, nor does the fire burn it. The waters wet it not, nor do the winds dry it up. Wherefore, knowing it to be such, thou oughtest not to grieve for it."

So, this scripture, as remarkable as it is in some of its teachings, does not change the practical duty of a knight as a member of the second caste. For, as we are told, "To a Kshatriya warrior nothing is better than a lawful fight, then by abandoning thy proper duty and thy honor, thou wilt be guilty of a crime"(2:31,33).

The charioteer, who is the chief speaker in the Bhagavadgita, proves to be the deity Krisha. Here is an indication that Hinduism has undergone another transformation for it represents the Supreme Deity in the form of one particular man. Krisha says that he has become incar-

nate "for the protection of good men, for the destruction of evil-doers, for the re-establishment of piety"(4:8).We are also told that whoever will worship Krishna with absolute devotion (bhakti) --

> "dwells in Me, whatever be his course of life (6:31). They who worship me devoutly, are in Me; and I also am in them. Be well assured that he who worships me does not perish." (9:29,31)

It is very remarkable that the Bhagavadgita offers universal salvation to sinners; and even to women and low-caste Sudras. However, it reaffirms the main features of historic and orthodox Hinduism in its description of the unchangeable nature and function of the four castes.

> "The office of the Kshatriya, born of his proper nature, is heroism, energy, firmness, skill, resolution in battle, liberality, and a ruler's bearing. The office of a Vaisya, born of proper nature is servitude." (18:43-44)

Indeed, the deity of the Bhagavadgita, Krishna, declares "The four castes were created by me"(4:13). Other teachings of the Bhagavadgita are reverence for the Vedas and that the great goal to be desired is the termination of reincarnation or transmigration. On the whole the book is rather a supplement to traditional Hinduism than otherwise. It adds to the old religion the new formulation as found in the term 'devotion'. The practical message is that the caste duty must be performed and that one should trust his God for the rest of his salvation. Salvation is to be obtained chiefly through personal devotion to a personal deity.

3 From the Bhagavadgita to Ramanuja.

a Period of the Puranas, 500 A.D.

Following the period of the Bhagavadgita to about 500 A.D., we have a literature called Puranas, or 'Old Tales'. The chief note of this literature is its sectarianism."There is no longer any attempt at a national literature to which all might contribute, as was the case with the Mahabharata. The Puranas give us the whole cycle of the later myths about Krisna connected with Mathura and Vrindavana. The story of his childhood is given in full detail, and all his pranks among the cowherds are related. The Harivamsa and the Visnu Purana and even the late Bhagavata Purana do not mention Radha, Krisna's cowherd mistress. She is made a great deal of, however, in the Padma Purana and the Brahma-vaivarta Purana. This new emphasis in these later books is the source of the immorality of certain of the Vaisnava sects. Though the Puranas are not all alike, most of them show a clear relation both in regard to literary form and religious thought to the various strata of the Mahabharata and to the Law Books.

b Sankaracarya (788-850 A.D.)

By 600 A.D. both a decadence of Buddhism and an invigoration of Brahmanism had set in. As we have seen the Mahabharata existed as a great collection of epic and religious poetry and the major part of the Puranas were composed by this time. It is difficult to describe the distribution of

sects in these earlier times. Authorities differ as to whether Siva or Visnu commanded the allegiance of the majority. The monuments of the Guptas at Eran suggest that these great kings were Visnuites, but a little later the cult of Siva is more prominent. 19 The emperor Harsha (612-648 A.D.) and his family were inclined toward eclecticism and honored Siva, the Sun and Buddha, but there is no record that they worshiped Vishnu. It is probable that during the seventh century a struggle was on between Buddhism and Hinduism and Hinduism resulting in a victory for Siva. This conflict is connected with the names of Kumarila Bhatta (725 A.D.) and Sankaracaya (800 A.D.). However, it cannot be confined to the activities of any two individuals. There can be no doubt that the elements that compose Hinduism had been active before the eighth century and that Buddhism continued to exist for some time after. Probably the careers of these two men are the best record of the turn religious thought was taking. They have been credited with reviving Hinduism. It is true that they did lay stress in the authority of old tradition, but the outcome of their labors was to give authority and solidity to the mixture of Brahmanism, Buddhism and the other popular beliefs that had grown up. Kumarila was said to have been a Brahman of Bikar who was a Buddhist monk, but became a worshipper of Siva and such a vigorous persecutor of his former

19 Eliot, page 207

faith that he persuaded a king of his time (Sudhanvan) to exterminate it from the Himalaya to Cape Comorin. This, of course, is a monstrous exaggeration, but his philosophical works indicate that he was a determined enemy of the Buddhists. He taught little about Meta-physics or the nature of God, but he insisted on the necessity and efficacy of Vedic rites.

Sankara (Sankaracarva) was much more important both as a thinker and an organizer. He was probably born 788 A.D. in a family of Nambutiri Brahmans at Kaladi in Cochin state. 20 The accounts of Sankara's life are largely a collection of legends in which, however, the following facts stand out. He was a pupil of Govinda who was the pupil of Gaudapada. It is possible, though it cannot be proved, that this was the Gaudapada who was the author of the metrical philosophy that bore his name. Sankara wrote many popular hymns as well as some commentaries on the Upanisads, Vedanta Sutras, and Bhagavdagita. Thus he recognized both Vedic and post-Vedic literature. He resided for some time on the Narbudda and at Benares. He made several journeys on which he founded four monasteries, at Srigeri, Puri, Dwaraka and Badrinath in Himalaya. It is said that on his death bed he asked forgiveness for going on pilgrimages and frequenting temples because by so doing he had seemed to forget that God is everywhere.

20 Grousset, Page 62

Sankara's greatest achievement was an exposition of the Vedanta. He based his arguments on the Vedic texts and "aimed at being merely conservative."21 But the Vedic texts are obscure and even the ancient commentaries are obscure and inconsistent. It was reserved for his genius, therefore, to produce out of them a system that even now holds first place for its consistency, thoroughness and profoundity. Since his time the Vedanta has been considered the principle philosophy of India, a position it does not seem to have held before. While his interpretation of it is often contested and it is hardly suited to popular religion, yet, his philosophical insight still commands respect and to some extent the adherence of most educated Hindus.

c <u>Manikka - vasagar, 10th-11th centuries</u>

Some time during the tenth or eleventh centuries, (the authorities differ greatly as to the date), there appeared a poet-saint by the name of Manikka-vasagar. He exercised a great and enduring influence on the faith of South India because of his deep personal devotion and his <u>Tiruvasagam</u>, or 'Sacred Utterances', which is full of the most intense religious feeling. "Here we have the

21 Eliot, page 208

doctrines of the Saiva Seddhanta fused into passionate experience in the heart of a worshipper of Siva." 22 Manikka is said to have been prime minister to a Pandyan king and, according to legend, went to seek horses for the king. But on the way Siva, surrounded with a great company of saints, revealed himself to him. The king's errand was forgotten; Manikka renounced the world and began a pilgrimage from town to town, worshipping at the various seats of Siva and composing songs and hymns. From this time on Saiva Shrines became popular and the sect was permanently established. As is the case with many saints in all religions, Manikka-vasagar returns again and again to his conversion as being the central point in his religious experience and as being the source of his inspiration. There is such an accent of humility, a sense of his unworthiness and an emphasis upon divine grace, that he seems to be very near to the spirit of the Christian saints. We find him again and again giving such utterances as a devout soul would express who had sought God sincerely and had come to some degree of fellowship with Him. e.g.,

"'These gods are gods indeed,'-'These others are the gods,' men wrangling say: and thus
False gods they talk about and rant and rave upon this earthly stage, and I

22 Macnicol, page 171

No pity could boast: that earthly bonds might cease
  to cling, to him I clung.
To him, the god of all true gods, go thou, and breathe
  his praise, O humming-bee." 23

In Manikka we have something like a definite reaction against Sankara's teachings that lay so much stress on the pantheistic doctrine of Brahman and the complete identification of the soul with God, along with the theory that the world is altogether illusory. The tendency had been growing slowly away from Sankara and Manikka was about the first to voice it and to pave the way for Ramanuja (died 1137 A.D.) who established in an orderly system his tenets against Sankara's monism.

C Place kept for an appreciation of the self in most of India's historic religion

This historical survey of the religions in India and the chief personalities associated with them preceeding Ramanuja indicates that, with a few exceptions, place was left for an appreciation of the self. Even in the case of these exceptions, such as primitive Buddhism, the impersonal tendencies were short lived and soon took over theistic elements. In the Rig Veda, while we find its conceptions to be necessarily those of a primitive age, the worship of the great god Varuna is clearly of a theistic nature. He stands out before the people with some-

23 Pope's Tiruvasagam, pages 143,144 (Macnicol, page 173)

thing of the character of the Jehovah of the Hebrews for his moral greatness. Toward the end of the Vedic period we feel a pantheistic tendency in the Vedic polytheism which, with the influence of certain philosophical tendencies, leads to the way of abstraction ending logically in agnosticism. This brings us to the Brahmanic period which is so buried under its fetichism and demonology that it is difficult to find anything that can be called theistic here. However, we hear something of Visnu as a deliverer of mankind from distress and a hope for immortality and the growth of the feeling of bhakti; all of which at least leaves the way open to theistic thought. The Upanisads are largely antagonistic to the sacerdotalism of the Brahmanas, but are not necessarily anti-Brahmanical. Indian thought is becoming monistic, though the conflicting religious currents of the period make it hard to analyse. In some of the Upanisads, especially the practical one of deliverance, theistic ideas are to be found clearly impressed. Even in Jainism and Buddhism, systems that originated in atheism, certain theistic elements are to be found. In Jainism, it is true, they are feeble and can be but vaguely seen in the search for deliverance. In Buddhism there are certain Visnuite elements as seen in the plan to deliver mankind from distress. Buddhism is

"practical and non-metaphysical" in character. Its asceticism is a discipline. In other words, it has theistic elements and makes room for faith. In the Bhagavadgita we have teachings that express the need of the people for a personal God. Its teachings are not systematic but an immanent God is brought into relation with men. He is related to the doctrine of karma and the doctrine of grace, and a doctrine of works that free the soul is formulated. Thus we have seen the religion of India throughout her history attempting to meet the needs of a restless people. It often seemed that all religion was to be covered up with a load of atheism or impersonal monism, but by the end of the eleventh century Hindu thought has come to the stage of development where nothing short of the conception of a personal God will satisfy.

D The Contribution made by Ramanuja (1017-1137 A.D.) 24

It was for Ramanuja to make a long stride in the right direction. He was a member of the Sri-Vaisnava cult of the Tamil country. It was during his time that the sect reached the summit of its history and became the model by which other sects

24 Dates from Grousset, page 100

Note: This would make him 120 years of age at death.

formed their literature and organization. They introduced the singing of the enthusiastic lyrics of the Alvars in the temple ritual. Long before Ramanuja assumed the place of leader the use of Tamil in the service of worship had brought the cult near the people. The change from the use of Sanskrit to Tamil is accredited to Nathamuni, a poet, theologian and teacher of the last of the tenth century. The succession of teachers is Nathamuni, Pundarikakaha, Ramamisra and Yamunacharya preceding Ramanuja. 25 We know little about the second and third of these men, but Yamunacharya, who lived in the middle of the eleventh century was a competent scholar and left several important works. He sought to establish the reality of the human soul in opposition to the school of Sankara and gave the earliest statement of the Visishtadvaita philosophy, of which Ramanuja became the classical exponent.

Ramanuja was born at Sriperumbudur near Madras where he is still commemorated and worshipped at a celebrated shrine. As a youth he studied in Conjuveram from a teacher, named Yada Prakasa, belonging to the school of Sankara. But he soon disagreed with his guru and became an adherent of the modified monism that was being taught in Srirangam by Yamunacharya. He was still a young man when his teacher died and although he had not been trained in the school he

25 Ramanuja is said to have been a great revivalist and to have used these Tamil hymns in his work as religious leader much as our modern Western evangelists use the gospel type of hymnology. His influence as practical religious leader was great. He stands at the head of a long list of reformers (such as Nimbarka, Madhva, Ramananda and Desika) nearly all of whom built upon him.

had become so prominent as a Vaishnava scholar that he was invited to become leader of the sect. He accepted the invitation but did not begin teaching until he had learned all he could from former pupils of his great teacher. By his appointment he came in control of the temple of Srigragam as well as of the school and was in a place of almost pontifical authority. He proved to be a most successful teacher and controversialist and "for some twenty years he lectured, held discussions and wrote books." 26

1 The revolt against Sankara's "Advaita"

As we have said, he revolted against Sankara's "Advaita", or strict monism. Sankara taught that nothing existed except the one existence called Brahman or paramatman, the Highest Self, Brahman, was pure being and thought (he considered the two to be identical) without qualities. "Brahman is not intelligent but is intelligence itself." 27 The human soul is identical with Brahman and not merely a part of it. It is itself the whole universal indivisible Brahman. This does not really assert that man is equal to God for the soul is identical with Brahman only in so far as it forgets its separate human existence. Thus a man who has pride in himself is differentiated from Brahman. Of course, in the

26 Farquhar - Religious Literature of India, page 242

27 Eliot, page 312

world we seem to see not only differentiation and multiplicity, but also a plurality of individual souls distinct from one another and from Brahman. This appearance is due to what Sankara calls Maya (illusion), which is associated with Brahman and is the cause of the phenomenal world. Thus he gives us a doctrine of illusion. Nothing in this world is real. Sankara goes on to explain that Brahman was not actuated by a motive in the ordinary sense in making the world, for that would imply simply human action and passion. He says, "We see in every-day life that certain doings of princes, who have no desires left unfulfilled, have no reference to any extraneous purpose but proceed from mere sportfulness. We further see that the process of inhalation and exhalation is going on without reference to any extraneous purpose, merely following the law of its own nature. Analogously, the activity of the Lord also may be supposed to be mere sport, proceeding from his own nature without reference to any purpose". 28 Of course, this is not really an explanation of the scheme of things or of the origin of evil. It means that the Advaita is so engrossed in ecstatic contemplation of the omnipresent Brahman that it gives no

28 S.B.E. Vo. XXXIV pp. 356-7

attention to such a mere by-product as the physical universe. Such reasoning could not go unchallenged even in India. There are indications that Sankara's doctrine of illusion met with serious opposition even in his time. The author of the Dabistan,(a seventeenth century work), tells a Berkleyen story about Sankara. "His enemies wished to test his belief in his own philosophy; so they drove an elephant at him, on which the philosopher ran away. 'Ho!' they jeered, 'Did you not maintain that all was a mere illusion? Then an elephant is illusion. Yet you take flight before it.' 'Yes', replied the philosopher, 'all is illusion: there was no elephant, and there was no flight'". 29

2 Ramanuja's theory of "Vishishtadvaita"

Ramanuja developed the theory of Vishishtadvaita, or at least put it in its best expression. Like Sankara he based his theories on the upanisads for Authoritative material. The Upanisads contained within them various currents of thought so that it was not

29 Hopkins, Religions of India, page 498 (foot note)

difficult for either school to find texts in support of the particular and differing doctrines held by each. Thus it was possible for Ramanuja to find a basis for a philosophy, in which, while the absolute supremacy of Brahman was maintained, the doctrine of Maya was rejected and the reality of the world and of individual souls was admitted. The doctrine that individual souls are not essentially one with the Supreme was a great contribution and whether or not Ramanuja himself was the creator of the ideal, his emphasis on this point meant much to Hindu Philosophy.

a Individual souls are not essentially one with The Supreme

The authorities seem to be unanimous in the belief that Ramanuja taught that individual souls were not essentially one with the Supreme. E. W. Hopkins says, "......the school of Vedanta (that is, the partially idealistic school of Ramanuja (foot note) which is not 'purely idealistic', grants reality to God and to the human soul." 30 Grousset says, "Ramanuja, and

30 Hopkins, E. W., Ethics of India, page 196

after him, all the vishnuite teachers, admitted that the souls of individuals and the inanimate world were just as real as Brahman himself, and that their individualtity could never be entirely lost." 30a J. McKenzie tells us that "Ramanuja was able to find a basis for a philosophy in which .... the reality of the world and of individual souls is admitted." 31 Ramanuja's own words substantiate these statements for in one of his commentaries he says, "We have proved that Brahman, which the Vedanta texts teach to be the sole cause of the world......is other than the so-called individual soul." 32 It is important to note this fact of his belief in the individuality of the soul, not merely because it is a progressive step away from pure monism but because, as we shall see later, there is an open question as to whether or not Ramanuja carried the idea of the individuality of the soul through

30a Grousset, page 101 (tr.)

31 McKenzie, J., Hindu Ethics, page 159

32 S.B.E. Vol. XLVIII, page 255f

to the conclusion that it is associated with the Supreme after release from earthly bondage or is re-absorbed into the Supreme. At any rate, we are safe in saying that souls during their earthly existence are independent of the Supreme even though created by Him.

(1) The Essence of the self

It is difficult to tell whether Ramanuja felt that the soul was a piece of Brahman broken away, as it were, or whether it was something other and that Brahman controlled it. He speaks of God as the "internal Controller" of men. This, from one point of view, might suggest that the soul was not of the same substance as God; yet, Ramanuja is predominately pan-theistic, and he insists that whatever exists is contained within God. This would admit of no ultimate second independent nature or element. Yet, within this unity there might be distinct elements of plurality which, if effects or modes of God, are absolutely real and not figments of illusion as Sankara held. Souls are of varying classes and degrees and include matter in all its forms. All taken together are represented as constituting the body of God and are in the same independent relation to him as is the matter that forms an animal or vegetable body to the soul or spirit. Perhaps the only way to approach an understanding of Ramanuja's conception of the soul in its relation to its

universe is to say,"as the body cannot be absolutely identified with the soul, the world of spirits and the material world cannot be identified with God. And on the other hand, as the body is not able to exist without the soul, neither one nor the other is able to exist without God; as the body .... does not live unless it is "infused" with the spirit, so the soul and body do not exist unless the divine emination penetrates them. 33 Now, the individual soul, while it is a mode of the supreme soul and is entirely dependent upon it and controlled by it, is, none the less real, eternal and endowed with intelligence and self-consciousness. It is without parts, is unchanging and imperceptible. Souls are classified in an interesting way. There are eternal (<u>nitya</u>) souls that (such as Anata and Garuda) dwell in constant communion with Narayana, and released and bound souls. Of the bound souls, some spend their time in seeking mere earthly gains, others strive for the bliss of heaven and still others are ambitious for the eternal bliss of final deliverance.

(2) <u>Its source found in God</u>

It is obvious, from what we have said, that the human soul has its source in God. Just how serious a matter the creation of souls was to the Supreme is a question. Ramanuja sometimes seems to indicate that Brah-

33 Grousett, page 102 (tr.)

man was not concerned primarily with the human soul while it was on earth or passing through the stages of transmigration. He says that God "in sport, as it were, creates, sustains and finally re-absorbs this entire universe comprising within itself infinite numbers of variously constituted animated beings." 34 Perhaps we can best express Ramanuja's idea of the creation by saying that God surely created the world and its inhabitants; why, we do not know.

(3) Self-realization (satyakamatva) one of the experiences Of the human soul

The soul having been created, whatever the means or reason, has the experience of self-realization. That is, it experiences consciousness, a consciousness that is unique to itself. While "the individual soul is the same substance as Brahman, and purely spiritual as he is; is of the same substance, yet it is not absolutely of the same nature. While Brahman is infinite, the individual souls are of limited dimensions........... Brahman exists independent of souls and continues to exist without them." 35 This implies not only the separate existence but also the individual self experience of the human soul.

(4) The realization of self in present and future life

While, as we have seen, there can be no doubt about the condition of the soul while on earth, the problem of

34 S.B.E., Vol. XLVIII, page 256

35 Grousset, page 104

its state in the future life is not so simple. In the present life the soul is individual, of the same substance as Brahman but separate within him. The form in which it exists before release is the pralaya condition which occurs at the end of each world period. During this interval matter exists in a subtle state possessing none of the qualities that make it an object of ordinary experience. Souls also cease to be connected with bodies and, while they retain the essential quality of being knowing agents, are unable to express any manifestation of their intelligence. Brahman in this condition is causal state (karanavastha). Creation develops from this condition by the will of God. Subtle matter takes on its form and souls extend their intelligence and enter into connection with bodies which are ascribed to them in accordance with their deeds in previous forms of existence. Brahman is said to occupy the state of effect in this condition(karyavastha). There is, however, no essential difference between the two states. The effect is the cause that has undergone a process of development. However, Ramanuja finds it important to lay stress on the distinction we have just pointed out because it serves to explain certain passages in the Upanisads that seem to deny all duality. In the causal states

differences are a minor detail and may be ignored. Those passages that assert the creation of the material world, while they assume the eternal existence of the soul, may be explained away by the fact that in its subtle state matter may be regarded as in a sense non-existent. In that condition it has none of its essential qualities while in the <u>pralaya</u> condition it remains intelligent. Indeed, "It is impossible not to be struck by the ingenious attempt of Ramanuja to reconcile the monism of his predecessors with his personalistic dualism." 36

In regard to the problem of the condition of the individual soul after salvation,(e.g. after release from the round of transmigrations), L.D. Barnett says that Ramanuja held,"that individual souls .... after salvation enter into a relation of perfectly heavenly service to him." 37 Also, Farquhar says, "When the released man dies, his soul enters eternal bliss, retaining its individuality forever." 38 But Sir Charles Eliot suggests that "Ramanuja preaches .... that God produces and re-absorbs the universe in sport," 39 and Ramanuja himself says that the soul reaches the "'abode of <u>Brahman</u>' and there 'abides within,i.e. is conscious of the highest <u>Brahman</u>.'"40 In his commentary on the <u>Vedanta Sutra</u> I Adhyaya, 1 Pada, 2, in regard to the state-

36 Grousset, page 104
37 Barnett, L.D. <u>Hinduism</u>, page 31
38 Farquhar, page 38
39 Eliot, Vol. II, page 234
40 Macnicol, page 106

ment,"(Brahman is that) from which the origin &, of this (world proceeds)," Ramanuja says, "The expression 'the origin,' &, means 'creation, subsistence, and reabsorption.'[41] The question, then, arises as to what is meant by "reabsorption." As the above quotations indicate, some authorities boldly assert that Ramanuja taught that the soul maintained an absolute independent nature in blessed association with God. Others, especially the more recent writers, are less certain and speak with less assurance about this conception of the eternal state. From an investigation of the translations of Ramanuja into English and German,[42] it seems to me that there is about as much basis for believing that he held to the re-absorption of the soul as to individual eternal existence. He evidently set out to prove that the individual soul is separate from Brahman but is not clear himself as to whether or not the soul is re-absorbed.[43] However, the fact that Ramanuja even hints at the possibility of individual existence in the hereafter is remarkable and indicates a great step in advance of the too common belief that tends to run through all Hindu thinking, even that of recent times, that the soul at final death or release from the succession of re-births loses its identity and comes to a state of perfect, inactive, passionless rest. Perhaps Sir Charles Eliot best expresses the entire situation when

41 S.B.E., Vol. XLVIII, page 156
42 S.B.E., Vol. XLVIII and Otto, R., Siddhanta Des Ramanuja page, 67f
43 Note: This opinion was expressed by Dr. F.L. Strickland and Dr. H.E. Wark, both of Boston University, School of Theology.

he says, "For the Vishnuites .... there exist God, the soul and matter, but most sects shrink from regarding them as entirely separate and bridge over the differences with various theories of emanations....... for practical religion the soul is entangled in matter and, with the help of God, struggles toward union with Him. The precise nature and intimacy of this union has given rise to as many subtle theories and phrases as the sacraments in Europe." 44 This is, it is true, a statement concerning later developments of the Ramanuja sects, but the fact that his followers seem to be uncertain about the matter as well as the evident lack of clearness in Ramanuja's own works leaves us free to hold the opinion that he was reaching for a truth that was just beyond his grasp and that he failed to bring to his possession.

(5) Means of attaining Salvation

Having seen something of the state of the soul during its temporal existence on earth, in its causal state and in the state of release, and that the state of release is the goal desired by the soul, we are ready to consider the means of obtaining salvation as taught by Ramanuja. He used as authority for much of his teaching the *Bhagavadgita*. This scripture expounds the doctrine of *karmayoga*. According to this, man is command-

44 Eliot, Vol. II, page 229

ed to perform acts without desire of reward. It includes the ceremonial worship of the deity which in many of the churches of Ramanuja is most elaborate. L.D.Barnett says, "in the schools of Ramanuja the worship of Vishnu and his bride Lakshmi, or Sri, is marked with great fervor of imagination reminding us sometimes of Dante's visions of Paradise." 45 Karmayoga also includes the practice of penance, the offering of sacrifice, the bestowal of charity and the performance of pilgrimages, These various stages in the development of the life of the devotee, Ramanuja taught, served as a preparation for juanayoga, or knowledge of oneself as distinct from matter and as a form of Brahman. This leads to bhakti which was not, for Ramanuja, mere ecstatic devotion, but rather a continuous process of meditation upon God. It was a state promoted by such subsidiary means as the use of none but unpolluted food, chastity, correct performance of rites, the practice of the virtues of charity, compassion, abstaining from taking life, truth and uprightness, cheerfulness and the absence of elation. If bhakti were thus promoted it would result in intuitive conceptions of God which make up the highest state that can be realized.

Prapatti, on the other hand, consists in the sense of submission. Opposition is to be avoided. There is something of the feeling of dependence on the Deity, of confidence in his protection. The believer choses God as his savior and places himself at His disposal. He is con-

45 Barnett, page 31

scious of his own utter debasement.

Another doctrine accredited to Ramanuja is that of acharyubhumanayoga, in which the devotee places himself under the control of his teacher who performs the acts necessary for deliverance for him.

b The place of the Supreme in Ramanuja's system

Thus far our emphasis has been on the problem of the human soul and we have mentioned the Supreme Being in a somewhat secondary way. Because Ramanuja's conception of God was loftier than any that preceded him, and because of his unique method of dealing with the problem of "the Absolute" this phase of his system should receive special attention.

(1) He is the source of Individual Souls

In the first place, he thought of God as the source of individual souls. Turning again to Ramanuja's commentary on the Vedanta Sutra (I Adhyaya,1 Pada,2,) in the statement,"(Brahman is that) from which the origin &, of this(world proceeds)," Ramanuja says "The'this' (in 'of this') denotes .... the aggregate of living souls from Brahma down to blades of grass, all of which experience the fruits (of their former actions)........ 'That from which,' i.e. that highest Person....... from whom the creation, subsistence, and reabsorption of this world proceed -- he is Brahman: such is the meaning of

the Sutrs." He then quotes from the Taitt. Upanisad, III, 1,"'That from which these beings are born, that by which when born they live, that into which they enter at their death, try to know that: that is Brahman'" 46 But we also find that God produces the world in "sport" and we wonder whether or not we have here a fully developed idea of a God that creates for a good purpose. It has been suggested that it is not a pernicious sport, however, and that even under the pressure of orthodox Hinduism, from which this notion comes, Ramanuja is trying to emphasize the goodness of God. Yet, we can but wonder at the God who in a fickle turn of mind forgets the dignity of deity, stoops to human pastime and does things that have serious and lasting effects on humanity. Sir Charles Eliot again suggests that while "Ramanuja preaches the worship of a loving God,.....when we read that God produces and reabsorbs the universe in sport we find that we are farther from Christianity than we at first supposed." 47

For Ramanuja the idea of creation is so bound up with re-absorption and release that it is impossible to deal with one without mentioning the other. Moreover, this interrelation of ideas is carried into the idea of the person of the 'Creator-God' in a most ingenious manner. Ramanuja speaks of "Brahman-

46 S.B.E., XLVIII, page 156

47 Eliot, Vol. II, page 234

Creator, or Brahman-Cause and Brahman caused or Brahman effect." 48 The first is to be regarded as a transcendent and personal God conforming to the conception held by the Visnuites. The second compares practically with the universe of things. Brahman-Creator is of subtle material; Brahman-Created -- has 'gross' form. "The creation of the world eminates from Brahman and is not the production of anything new; it is only a changing of the attributes or condition, a pure transformation of that which is subtle to that which has form. In the same way the destruction of the universe is nothing other than the transformation of that which has form to the subtle state." 49

In other words the Cosmos is none other than a mode of Brahman, yet for all practical purposes it is as though it were distinct from Brahman. It passes continually from homogeneity to hetrogeneity, from evolution to involution, from integration to formation without ever having any other content than that of God. God is creator and that which is created is God.

(2) Infinite in degree

In accord with what we have already said, Brahman is infinite in degree. He is "existence, knowledge, infinite; He is the cause of creation, sustenance and dissolution of the world. All existence is the body of Brahman." 50

48 Grousset, page 103f
49 Grousset, page 103
50 McKenzie, page 159

God is not purely abstract but possesses real qualities of goodness. He is "omniscient, omnipotent, supremely merciful." 51 Again, He is "the highest Person (<u>puru - shottama</u>), who is essentially free from all imper fec-tions and possesses numberless classes of auspicious qualities of unsurpassable excellence." 52 All of God's "purposes come true". He is kind, loving, and is a Fath-er to all men. In one of his commentaries Ramanuja says,"We have proved that Brahman, which the <u>Vedanta</u> texts teach to be the sole cause of the world, must be an intelligent principle other than the non-sentient prohhana, since Brahman is said to think. We have de-clared that this intelligent principle is other than the so-called individual soul." 53 At the same time, he says that God contains "this entire universe comprising within itself infinite numbers of variously constitut-ed animated beings." 54

It is not surprising that Ramanuja had some difficul-ty in picturing to himself some of the relations that this complex explanation of God and His relation to the universe produced. He goes on to no little pains to justify himself, telling us that the relation of non-sentient matter to Brahman is as the coils to a body of a snake, or that it is the same as that of the lumin-ous object to light which are one in that both are fire, and he emphasizes over and over again that "the material

51 Eliot, Vol. II, page 229
52 S.B.E., Vol. XLIX, page 3
53 S.B.E., Vol. XLVIII, page 255
54 S.B.E., Vol. XLVIII, page 235

world and human souls are not illusion but, so to speak, the body of God who comprises and pervades them." 55

Ramanuja claims to find the chief support for his opinions in the antaryami-brahmana, contained in the Brhadaranyaka Upanisad. In this sacred book Brahman is described as being inner ruler of the whole universe in all its aspects. He also speaks of a passage in the Svetasvatera Upanisad that lays stress on Brahman as being the empirical subject (bhokti), the objective world (bhogya), and the power which instigates (preritr). 56

(6) The five modes of God's Existence

God exists in five modes. They are (1) Para, the entire Supreme Spirit, (2) the fourfold manifestation as "Vasudeva, Sankarshana, Pradyumna, and Aniruddha," (3) such incarnations as Rama and Krishna,(4) the internal controller or Antaryamin "who abiding in the soul rules the soul within", and (5) duly consecrated images. The first form is the highest. Here He is represented as dwelling in His city of Vaikuntha under a pavilion of gems and seated on the serpent Sesa. He is adorned with celestial ornaments, bears his celestial arms and manifests himself in perfect satsifaction and bliss. In the second condition the manifestation consists of His several vyuhas or conditions assumed for the purpose of worship and creation. Of these Sankarsana possesses the

55 Eliot, Vol. II, page 235

56 It has been suggested that Ramanuja may have received some of his ideas from Christian sources. However, since he nowhere mentions them, and since suggestions for all his developments may be found in Hindu literature, we are inclined to agree with Macnicol (page 277) that the opinion that the Bhagavata religion was due to Christianity "can only be a conjecture".

qualities of knowledge (jnana) and power to maintain (bala). Badyumna has the power to rule (aisvarya) and to continue as an abiding character (vairya). Aniruddha has the power to create (sakti) and the power to overcome (tyas). Vasudeva has all six qualities. The third form is made up of the ten avatars of the ordinary mythology. It should be noted here that Ramanuja lays great stress on this manifestation. By the grace of God there are many incarnations. The deity is represented as coming again and again in the form of man that certain much needed truths may be revealed. The fourth, the Antaryamin is the condition in which he lives in the hearts of men. This can be seen by the supernatural vision of the Yogi, and it accompanies the soul in its passage to heaven. God in the fifth form dwells in idols made by the hands of men.

c He excels other thinkers of his time

There are several reasons why we think that Ramanuja excels other thinkers of his time. He emphasized devotion to a personal God. This opened the way of worship and salvation to the vast crowds of common people who had here-to-fore had little hope of communication with God. The belief in a God that had personal qualities of goodness, in a universe that was real, and in salvation for all human souls must have stood out in keen contrast to others of his time (the followers of Sankara) who denied the personality of God and indicated that the great accomplishment of man should be freedom from transmigration terminating in impersonality.

E Influence of his life and teaching

Our emphasis for the most part has been on Ramanuja's philosophical contributions. Our interest in this discussion is primarily in the field of philosophy. However, we should call to mind the fact that this man did not confine his activities to one field alone. He was as much a reformer in religion as he was a re-organizer in philosophy. Our attention ought to be directed to the practical influence of his life and teaching.

1 His influence on the Bhagavata religion

Ramanuja completed the work for Indian Theism that was begun by the unknown author of the Bhagavadgita. He established it in the midst of the Bhagavata religion by giving it an authoritative basis that it had not before had. For this reason his name became a new prasthana for Vaisnavism throughout the country, "a source whence flowed, north and west and east across the land, rivers of really vital and ethically enobling religion." 57 Because of what claimed to be a demonstration of its antiquity and its intimate relation with the most ancient and authoritative scriptures, he was able to accomplish for the Bhagavata religion of India with its pronounced theism what the Greek Fathers did for Christianity in its Hellinic environment.

57 Macnicol, page 112

2 <u>His influence on the Bhakti faith</u>

Ramanuja strengthened the religion of future centuries greatly by his addition to the doctrine of *bhakti*. Up to his time *bhakti* had meant merely "loving devotion". Devotion was now, as it had not been before, definitely linked with reflection, and the combination gave it new dignity. This addition to the doctrine made it depend upon personality in both God and man and a real and abiding self. It tended to diminish pantheistic beliefs for it could not thrive in the *pure* pantheism so common to Indian thought.

3 <u>His influence upon the life of the people</u>

There is a story related of Ramanuja that may well have something of true tradition behind it and that indicates something of his influence upon the people of his time and his bearing on the development of Vaisnavism as the people saw it. It is said that a noted *guru* of his time gave to Ramanuja, under the customary pledge of secrecy, his esoteric doctrine. But having learned it Ramanuja felt that it was the way of salvation that all the people should know and breaking his pledge proclaimed it to the world. A Characteristic of his teaching that marked it off from other sects in India is its exclusiveness. He must have had a most appealing personality to draw to him the large numbers he did in the face of this. The Indian pantheistic mind has always been too tolerant of any faith believing that each new god was but another manifestation of the nameless One. But for Ramanuja only the Vaisnavite pantheon was tolerated, a move toward monotheism seldom seen in India's religion.

The absence from the religion of the people of India of the intolerance, and what might be called the "monotheistic arrogance", of the Hebrew prophets, is due more than anything else to the pantheistic root of most of the thought of India with its consequent half-hearted - ness in affirming the divine unity. Perhaps no one since the time when the Vedic Varuna was worshipped was so convinced of this Semitic ideal as was Ramanuja. This new interpretation with his revivalistic spirit made it possible for this man, already in a powerful position as leader of his cult, to gather about him and his organization a devout, spiritual and energetic following.

F Summary

A review of our investigation discloses the fact, as we have suggested before, that Hindu thought is not to be set aside too lightly by students from the West, but that many and profound developments are to be reckoned with.

1 Ramanuja the outcome of a long period of development

We have seen, moreover, that Ramanuja was the natural outcome of a certain line of development in thought that covered a long period of time. He was not unlike the great men of other countries in this respect. He did, it is true, make a great contribution. But so far as we have been able to discover he did his work in a perfectly normal way.

We traced the tendency toward the ideal of a personal interpretation of the universe through the important literary productions. We attempted to make them reveal the period that they represented and were able to pick out some of the indications of a growing desire to solve the problems of life in an intelligent way. We began with the early Vedas and were somewhat surprised to find that already a very high idealism had grown up. The one God, Varuna was expressing for the people almost what Jehovah expressed for the early Hebrews. He over-shadowed all other deities for a long time and India seemed well on the way toward a personalistic idealism. But by some strange twist Varuna lost his power and thought took another turn and in the Brahmanas and Upanisads we see that the emphasis is taken largely away from the individual and his salvation and social and religious institutions swallow up the masses in a great priestly system. We are almost inclined to despair of any hope for India's intellectual salvation, but between the lines we see that it is quite probable that not all the story is written in the records and that there were many who knew something of the value of the individual soul and of fellowship with a God who was a personality and who heard and answered prayers.

2 Ramanuja's contribution was most valuable

After the periods mentioned there was a change for the better. Leading up to the time of the Bhagavadgita there were occasional leaders who broke away from the traditional order that had culminated in the impersonalism that was to have so great a vogue in India. The new development has its best expression in the Bhagavadgita with its suggestion of bhakti. Those who appreciated this new emphasis were increasing in numbers when Ramanuja came on the scene in the twelfth century. He gave the idea a new development. He made religion more worthful by backing it with a sane philosophy. He saw that the individual was the only thing in the universe that really was important. He gave individuality new meaning and the human soul as separate from the Eternal was stressed. Also there was a new emphasis on the personality of God. He became a Being that the common people could understand. They were able to go in person to the God that Ramanuja disclosed to them and worship Him. He became a Father to them. They were offered a way of salvation that was within their grasp. God was no longer a Being that expressed himself in absolute disinterest.

a It met a need of his day

Perhaps the important fact about Ramanuja's life and teaching is that he met a great need of his day. He read the need in the conditions of his time and

was most successful in molding the best of India's past into a solution for her problems then.

However, in spite of the fact that he made a greater contribution than any other philosopher or religious leader, and he deserves our most serious consideration, there was much that was left undone. He did not entirely overcome the impact of Hindu superstition. He allowed doctrines to creep into his theology that will not stand the test of criticism. Also, he never made a complete break with the old systems, hence, many of the evils, such as caste, transmigration and the crude idolatry, all of which were involved in these systems, remained. Never-the-less, he made such a stride forward that all that is purely Hindu and of real worth in India that has developed since his time has directly or indirectly found the root of its expression in him.

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